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ETHNOLOGY.

Contribution to the History of the Aleutian Isles, or Aleutia.

BY ARTHUR B. STOUT, M. D.,
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

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History of the Aleutian Isles, or Aleutia.

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(*Reprinted from the Kansas City Review of Science and Industry.*)

In the course of the year 1874, the California Academy of Sciences received the donation from the Alaska Commercial Company, of San Francisco, of two skeletons or mummies. These specimens were two from a collection of a dozen or more which were by them presented to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington. A report upon these latter was published by the Smithsonian Institution, and written by W. H. Dall, U. S. G. S., in 1878. To this very valuable essay on "The Remains of Later Prehistoric Man," I refer, with great pleasure, for many important details omitted in this paper.

The two mummies in question have remained in my care, as Curator of the Department of Comparative Anatomy of the Academy, since 1874, and, except to open the cases which contained the bodies, to disinfect and carbolize them, I have not until now ventured to study them. But such is the increasing interest in anthropology; in the prehistoric condition of man; his evolution; his ethnologic and archæologic history, that I have thought it important to disturb these remains and offer the work for comparison with that of other similar researches.

The source whence these mummies was procured is best described by quoting as follows from the report of Mr. Dall:

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"The most celebrated of these burial caves was situated on the island of Kaga'mil, one of the group known as the Islands of Four Mountains, or Four Craters. This group is not at present inhabited, except for a short period during the hunting season of each year.

"I visited these islands in 1873, but as the shores are precipitous, and as there are no harbors, the weather was too boisterous to permit us to remain in the vicinity. Even if we had landed, it is probable that we could have done little without a guide.

"The traders in the islands were aware of the existence of this cave and its contents, and one of them, Capt. E. Hennig, of the Alaska Commercial Company's service, had several times attempted to reach it unsuccessfully. In 1874, however, the weather being quite calm, and the presence of a hunting party, which he was taking away from the island, enabling him to find the cave without delay, he visited it and removed all the contents, so far as is known. On their arrival at San Francisco, the Company, who had instructed their agents to procure such material for scientific purposes when compatible with the execution of their regular employment, with commendable liberality, forwarded them to the National Museum at Washington. Two of the mummies were given to the California Academy of Sciences, but all the rest were received by the Smithsonian Institution. It is unfortunate that but few details were obtained as to the exact disposition of the bodies, or mummies, in the cave; the situation and form of the latter, and other particulars which would have had great interest. From accounts received from Father Innokenti Shayesnikoff, previously, I am led to infer that the cave is situated near the shore at a point where the coast is precipitous and without a beach, the landing being on large, irregularly broken fragments of rock, the tables from the cliffs above. The island contains active volcanoes, as I am informed, and in the immediate vicinity of the cave are solfataras, from which steam constantly arises, and the soil is said to be warm to the touch. The rock is of a whitish and ferruginous color and sharp grain. Specimens examined by Dr. Endlich, of the Smithsonian Institution, prove to be a silicious sinter, containing a little alumina and soda, and some hydrous sesquioxide of iron. In the spectroscope traces of lithium and potassium and possibly a trace of lime were seen.

"From this, and from the fact that the atmosphere of the cave is said to have been quite hot, rendering it uncomfortable to remain in, it is possible that the cave itself may be the crater of a small extinct solfatara.

"With regard to the age of these mummies, as they may be styled, I was informed, in 1871, by several of the more intelligent natives, that they fixed the date of the earliest interment in the following manner: It occurred in the autumn or winter During the following spring the first Russians ever seen by the natives of the Four Craters, arrived in the vicinity. These may have been Trapeanikoff's party, which left Kamschatka in 1758, but did not reach Umnak until 1760; or they may have been that of the infamous Pushkareff; or possibly of Maxim Lazeroff; but in any case, they can hardly have been the expedition

of Bering. In 1757 Ivan Nikiferoff sailed as far east as Unak, being the first Russian to do so, except those of Bering's Expedition, who did not land on any of the Andreanoff group, though in 1741 they saw the shores of numerous indeterminate islands from a distance. The earliest date, therefore, which we can assign to these remains would be 1756, making the oldest of them about one hundred and twenty years old.

"At all events they possess great interest as the best preserved relics of the state of things as they existed immediately prior to the Russian occupation, and when their pursuits and handiwork had not been modified by the introduction of any of the adjuncts of civilization."

The two specimens were preserved, each in an excellent case with glass cover. No implements whatever were found. No. 1 contained the skeleton of a man, and No. 2 contained the skeleton of a woman. This latter had been disturbed and the strappings of the package were off. The former was yet intact and its original binding unbroken. The odor was strong and penetrating, not that of putrefaction, but like creosote; not unlike that of buffalo robes smoke-dried by the North American Indians in their wigwams, only much more pungent. Large quantities of the larvæ of insects were in the cases, showing that animal life had been busy in the bodies.

The hope was now entertained that we possessed, perhaps, the remains of the distinguished toyon, or toygon, Kat-haya-Koochak, the renowned Aleut chief, famous for his courage, enterprise, riches, and love of family. (See Dall's Report, page 9.) But this chief is described as "a very small man," while our chief measures 5 feet 9 inches in the bones. Two units being allowed for skin, flesh, and general shrinkage between vertebræ, would give 71 inches, or 5 feet 11 inches. His cerements are of the simplest kind, while one of the mummies described by Dall was clothed in the finest wrought and most costly fabrics. Hence ours cannot be the remains of this great Aleut.

The strappings of the packages being taken off, a large sealskin envelope carefully wrapping the bodies, and much deteriorated by time was unfolded. Within this, and covering closely the anterior part of the body was the spoiled and disintegrated skin of some large bird, some of the feathers of which were still clinging to the rotted fibres of the skin. The bodies now exposed were yet in some places covered with the skin; in other parts the bones were entirely denuded. The skin was dark colored, desiccated and of pachydermic toughness, requiring the saw, rather than the knife, to divide it. It was also perforated with numerous little round holes made by some boring insect. No traces of viscera remained, but the thoraces were not opened. Whether evisceration had been practiced at the time of embalming, or whether the intrusive animal life had consumed them, was not easy to determine, but the crania were entirely empty, and we can hardly believe that the embalmer removed the brain. The limbs were carefully and most compactly folded on the body, apparently to make the embalmed package as tight and small as possible, and might be laid flat or placed in a sitting posture. The heads were depressed so that the chin settled down

into the pit of the neck, and the lower maxillæ being thus forced down, the mouths were wide open.

It is regretable that photographs of these mummies cannot be offered, as in the picture given by Mr. Dall the limbs are dislocated and distorted, failing entirely to express any idea the embalmers may have desired to perpetuate, or the admirable care and solicitude in their work. The thighs were brought up and doubled close upon the abdomen; the legs folded snugly upon the thighs, and the feet pressed sharp down backward. The arms were laid symmetrically on the thorax, and the forearms bent upon the arms, the hands not crossed in repose upon the chest, but with the fingers curved over the front of the shoulders.* Thus much for the aspect of the bodies.

What may be the origin, we may ask of these people? Whence came they?

It is not probable that an autochthonic race existed in these Aleutian Islands. Such rude, inhospitable storm beaten regions were not likely to be the cradle of a special tribal birth. Regarding these islands as they appear on the map, the idea is forced upon the mind that at some remote epoch the two continents of Asia and America formed one territory. The volcanic nature of the entire region indicates a vast change of the earth's surface by which the constinuity of the continents was destroyed. The long promontory of Aliaska extending from Alaska, nearly touches the easternmost island of the Aleutian chain. A long succession of wild eruption-torn islands in a crescentic line crosses the sea, thence to the Kamschatkan coast; the whole group, hung like a grand festoon of gems formed by Titan hands and resplendent with the illumination of volcanic fires, appears suspended from shore to shore, to adorn the approaches to the Straits of Behring, or rather, in a military view, like a vast circumvallation of fortresses to defend their entrance from invasion. But the Arctic Ocean has its own defences and needs no such gigantic ornament. Only the ruined abutments now remain of the "bridge," which some author calls the Aleutian Islands, by which migrations of peoples passed from continent to continent, and the bridge was the segment of a circle.

This view seems sufficient without seeking a Malay, Japanese or Chinese origin for the natives of the Aleutian Isles. Their progenitors were an autochthonic race. It is a prevailing opinion that a vast invasion of wild tribes from the far northwest poured down upon the ancient mound builders of North America, sweeping them away from their copper mines on Lake Superior, destroying their temples, burial places and fortresses in the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi, and exterminating their race or driving them back whence they originated, across Texas into Mexico and Central America, leaving no vestiges of them but their teocallis and their mounds. How immense must have been such an invasion and

* In regard to Aleutian burial ceremonies, says Coxe, page 173: "The bodies of poor people are wrapped in their own clothes, or in mats, then laid in a grave and covered with earth. The bodies of the rich are put, together with their clothes and arms in a small boat made of the wood driven ashore by the sea; the boat is hung upon poles placed cross-ways, and the body is then left to rot in the open air."

how persistently continuous in its course, to have so completely obliterated the numerous and extended populations of the Mound Builders, possessed as they were of the defences and weapons of a high civilization. The great nomadic incursions recorded in history, like that of Genghis Khan into Europe, become inconsequential in the comparison.

If such things did occur it must have been at an epoch long anterior to the present condition of the "far northwest." Earthquake and cataclysm, the battles of fires and waters must have created greater disturbance with far more destructive and radical invasions than any human agency could have accomplished. The present state of the physical geography of this "far northwest" utterly precludes the possibility of any such invasions, fulfilled by barbaric hordes. Neither time nor circumstance could accomplish under such physical conditions so gigantic a work and have left not even a mound or a mile-stone to mark its route.

There must have been upheavals of volcanic peaks with their boiling lava chimneys forming mountains merged in the waters with only their summits visible above the ocean, like the island of the "Four Craters," and again a subsidence of territory from the caving in of the vast subterranean cavities emptied of their seething contents. With all this must have occurred an inundation of waters, in which great cataclysm the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans blended, the grand Gulf stream of the former passing through the Arctic Sea by the Straits of Behring with the equally grand Pacific Black Stream, or Kuro Shiwo. Before this epoch the ancestors of the Esquimaux in America and the Koriaks, the Chukches, or Tungusian Tartars of Asia may have traded, and dwelt in their igloos together.*

Let all this be as it may, at the time that the Russians discovered these islands, the natives of the different groups spoke different languages, and, hence we may infer that the inhabitants of the various groups were the remains of migrations from both America on their east and Asia at their west, as they again coalesced, and were regenerated from the lapse of time.

Some question has been made of the derivation of the name Aleut, and even suggested that it was a term of contempt of the Russian explorers and fur hunters for the islanders, (see Dall's Report page —,) but we find in the work of Wm. Coxe, A. M., London, 1780, Russian Discoveries Between Asia and America, published just 100 years ago, that the word Aleut is Russian, meaning "*a bold rock.*" Such is the distinctive character of all the islands, and, hence seems peculiarly adapted as their title.

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* The pent-up waters of the Arctic Ocean burst through the Behring Strait and overwhelmed the ruins left from volcanic fires—as the waters of the Nevadas by a thousand floods at some epoch tore through the Golden Gate. As a further illustration of this subsidence and upheaval it is recognized that the waters of the Arctic Ocean once penetrated the American continent as far—if not still further—as Great Slave, and Athabasca Lakes, and that that long chain of lakes in the interior of the continent are only the vestiges of the departure of the greater sea. In the same manner as it is conceded that Siberia was once covered by the Arctic waters, the remains of which are the Lake Baikal and the Caspian Sea, while such great rivers as the Lena, Yenessei and Anadyr now drain the mountain lines back to the retreated ocean.

A glance at the grouping of these islands is important to our purpose. 1st. At the northwest of the semi-circular girdle are Behrings Island and Copper Island, where large outcroppings of copper indicate an abundant mine of the metal, and possibly point to a line of copper vein from the shores of Lake Superior over the region of the Coppermine Country in Alaska to this deposit. We may remark in passing, that it is surprising that with this free surface deposit of copper at this locality, no copper implements have been discovered among the relics of the old Aleuts.

2nd. Say SE. are the Aleutian Islands proper, viz: Attak, Semitski, and Shemiya, W. NW. to E. SE.

3d. Then, NE. some six islands, the Andreanoffski group, or *Ostrova*, meaning islands, and

4th. The Lyssie Ostrova, or Fox Island, stretching SE. and N. by E. almost to the Alaska promontory, and the last discovered at the epoch now alluded to.

This last important group contains Umnak, Ounal-askka, or Aghunalaskka, the principal depot of the Alaska Commercial Company, with St. Paul and St. George further to the north, and also the barren deserted isle, one of the "Four Craters" or Kagámil. In a cave of this island, a bold bluff, mid-ocean, storm-lashed in its arctic clime, but yet still seething and steaming with solfataras, and volcanic heat, is the Mausoleum of our Aleut Chief and all his family. Here we meet him and his progeny on a desolate fragment of the ruptured territory which once united the two great continents—the monumental stone of the ruin not only of the land but the division of unnumbered peoples. Imagination may picture, but cannot surpass the grandeur of the truth. Another division of the Aleutians is:

I. The Kaniagmuts, and II. The Aleuts. III. The "Vaygeli," or Spectral Outlaws. These are supposed to be the original inhabitants who disdained any outside authority, refused to be converted to Christianity, and consequently live, if such really exist, as independent natives or banditti in the interior inaccessable mountains.

The Vaygeli may possibly be only the predatory animals which come at night and carry off the islanders' provisions. But the mythical or legendary belief of the natives points distinctly to ancestral sagas which have been orally handed down to them from generation to generation. We may infer either an extinct prehistoric race with which the present family has no lineal descents, or we may refer the legend to the earliest progenitors of present tribal groups.

As regards our present mummies they are undoubtedly too recent, whether we allow them 120 years, or about 340, according to Captain C. L. Luneuski, to consider them in the light of *prehistoric* remains, or concede to them Mr. Dall's distinction of "Remains of Later Prehistoric Man" Capt. Lunieus'ki has been a resident of the Aleut Isles for many years, connected with the Alaska Commercial Company. He antedates our mummies many years to the Russian discovery and conquest of the islands. His intelligent studies predicated in part

on the diversity of their languages, gave to the Aleuts a divided descent, in part from the Esquimaux of America, and the Mongoloids of northeastern Asia.

The Russian explorers and fur-hunters of importance in the discovery of the various islands were:

Bering in 1728
Bering and Tcherihoff in 1741
Nevodsikoff in 1745
Serebranikoff . . . . . 1753 to 1756
Trapesnikoff . . . . . 1758 to 1760
Bethshevin . . . . reached Alexsu, furthest island east.
Tolslyh . . . . . 1760 to 1764

These navigators, with few exceptions, treated the natives with great barbarity. Many of their expeditions were failures and their vessels wrecked; several of them were burned by the natives. All of them suffered great hardships. Of their vessels, says Coxe, page —, "Most of them which are equipped for these expeditions, are two masted; they are commonly built without iron, and in general so badly constructed that it is wonderful how they can weather so stormy a sea. They are called in Russian *Skitiki*, sewed vessels, because the planks are sewed together with thongs of leather. Some few are built in the river Kamschatka, but they are for the most part constructed in the haven of Ochotsk. The largest are manned with seventy men, the smaller with forty men."

Hence the Aleuts, as naval constructors, with their elegantly and artistically built bidarkas and baydars far excelled in skill their abusive invaders. But these latter had guns. In their warfare they displayed much military invention. To avoid the guns they constructed large double screens made of seal skins, stuffed between with dried fibre of grass, and advanced toward the vessel, pouring upon its deck their missiles from behind, and finally setting fire to it with sulphur found in their island craters.

Inside of the war faculty, and touching the home and domestic idea, wild to our appreciation as it may be, we are taught by the elaborate and exhaustive report of Mr. Dall on the mummies from our "Four Crater" cave, that their art work by their women, whether the result of nearly lost hereditary culture, or of native original industry, patience and invention, was high in its excellence. (See report of Case 17478 in the Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, page 11 of Dall's Report, cited). This ethnological description is rich in its suggestive text. How did the Aleuts learn to make these extra fine fabrics, with nothing but Aleutian raw material? Our present chief is silent but he left head enough to explain it all.

In brief, from all this we can derive enough to feel sure that this ancient folk, after their own way of thinking, education, and old civilization, possessed a high sense of religion, believed in a future life, as proved by their devoted funeral ceremonies, worshipped a divine creator; appreciated the love of home, were profoundly impressed with the devotion due to the family bond. Still further may we trace the illustration, for if cranial capacity and form can be regarded as

the index of mental ability, we have shown that the eagle-like tenant of his northern fastness was worthy of his eyrie. Again, will it appear that here on the confines of nations, in the same tomb the two great types of the human races, the dolicocephalic and the brachycephalic heads, were together embalmed.

When the Russians discovered the islands the Kamschatdale interpreters, who could speak the language of the Aleut group could not understand the dialect of the natives of the Fox Islands. To obtain their objects they resorted to the cunning device of utilizing the paternal affection of the chiefs. Under pretense of keeping the peace and insuring the tribute of seal skins, exacted by the Russian Government, they caused the sons of toygons, or chiefs, to be delivered to them as hostages. These they sent to Kamschatka to acquire the Russian language. The celerity and aptitude with which these boys learned to interpret went far to prove the natural intelligence of the people so more than barbarously treated by them as barbarians. As reward for their services they converted them as usual to Christianity, but piously took their skins; nor did they fail to appropriate their women, which, as "*ante Trojam fuit*," was always the cause of their wars with the Russians. Their hospitality, kindness, and indispensable aid to the invaders of their realm were devoted and unceasing, until deceived, as were other Indians by Cortes and Pizarro, by lust, and the "*auri sacra fames.*"*

The existence of three languages, or perhaps dialects, may be inferred, for Coxe states, (page 264,) that the inhabitants of Unalaska were called Khigolaghi; those next eastward to Unimak were named Kighigusi, and those of Unimak and Alaxa, were styled Kalaghayekïki. In 1741 Bering sighted and Steller first landed on the American continent. (Coxe, page 277).

The Russians conquered Kamschatka in 1696, taking 45 years to discover the way from shore to shore. As the islands then were peopled, so in probability were their languages introduced, by the various tribes of refugees in quest of safety in flight, or as hunters of game from the shores of both continents, or as they mingled before the continents were cleft apart.

* Their phallic customs are more worthy of leniency than are the morbid abuses of other people.